

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 2, 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Inhofe:

Over the last week and a half, I participated in a congressional delegation (CODEL) where we met with the leadership of multiple NATO governments, as well as officials from EU partner nations. During discussions with presidents, prime ministers, and ministers of defense, the non-combatant evacuation operation was ongoing at Hamid Karzai International Airport. The operations in Afghanistan were a consistent theme in these engagements, and our hosts uniformly expressed their alarm at the events unfolding.

As you know well, the military mission in Afghanistan was deeply personal for many of our allies and partners. After we were attacked by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001, the United States invoked Article 5 for the first and only time in the history of NATO. Our NATO allies fought and worked alongside us for two decades to defeat the Taliban and create a stable Afghan government with the goal of never again allowing the country to be used as a safe haven for terrorist organizations planning attacks against foreign nations. They shared the burden of these efforts, shared a commitment to the future of the people of Afghanistan, and, like us, lost citizens fighting against the Taliban.

Throughout the work trip, our hosts consistently expressed to us their belief that the situation in Afghanistan could have turned out very differently, and the way in which this withdrawal occurred “cast a shadow on U.S. might and NATO might.” Some of the countries we visited have worked for decades to combat anti-democratic narratives fostered by malign Russian influence; their leaders made clear that recent events undermined this effort and would bolster anti-U.S. and anti-NATO groups in their countries. Furthermore, we overwhelmingly heard from our NATO partners sentiments of frustration at the lack of consultation from the administration ahead of the withdrawal and evacuation efforts.

In order for NATO’s Article 5 commitments to remain credible, it is imperative that our NATO allies view the United States as a steadfast partner who both honors its commitments and meaningfully engages with other alliance members. It was clear to our CODEL that the officials with whom we met think the U.S. has fallen short of these expectations.

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The concerns raised by our allies only augment the concerns expressed by my constituents and other American citizens over the past two weeks. Given the significant and wide-ranging consequences for U.S. interests and our alliance relationships, it is vital that Congress conduct thorough oversight of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Senate Armed Services Committee has a central role to play in this, examining the operational conduct of a military-led evacuation effort, as well as seeking answers to broader questions about the administration's counterterrorism policy and the strategic impact these events have on our national security interests.

Therefore, I respectfully request that the Armed Services Committee hold hearings on the Afghanistan withdrawal as expeditiously as possible. It is very important that these hearings be public, in order to provide the American people – as well as our allies and partners – a greater understanding of the administration's decisions and strategy going forward.

The president has repeatedly referred to and characterized advice he received from senior military officials, as well as the judgement of the intelligence community. For this reason, I also request that Secretary Austin, General Milley, and Director Haines appear before the committee to testify.

Sincerely,



Deb Fischer
United States Senator